

Off and Running!

Communities of Opportunity (COO) is a new initiative with the ambitious goal of creating greater health, social, economic, and racial equity in King County so that all people thrive and prosper. It stems from a recognition that the region's overall high quality of life is masking profound differences by place and race – differences that, if left unchecked, will affect the well-being and prosperity of our entire region.

While working on these issues is not new, *how* it's being approached is what is transformative. In its first six months, this new partnership has gained significant positive momentum—engaging community, refining its framework, and convening initial funding partners. We're excited to share the progress and to preview what's ahead.

What is Communities of Opportunity?

COO is an effort launched by [The Seattle Foundation](#) and [King County](#) to improve health, social, racial, and economic outcomes by focusing on *place*, and to do so by partnering with communities to shape and own solutions.

How did COO start?

- COO has been taking shape over the past few years. At The Seattle Foundation, its Center for Community Partnerships was crafting a neighborhood partnership initiative to address economic and racial equity. At King County, a Health and Human Services Transformation Plan—championed by County Executive Dow Constantine in partnership with the King County Council—was proposing the launch of a place-based initiative to address the region's troubling inequities.
- King County and The Seattle Foundation soon discovered their shared agenda. Rather than proceed with separate, parallel efforts, they joined forces in March 2014 under a new umbrella called Communities of Opportunity.
- To launch COO, The Seattle Foundation committed \$2.5 million over five years. King County committed resources from a \$500,000 “catalyst fund” included in the 2014 budget.
- Throughout the spring and summer, a dedicated group of community partners came together to work on the initial design of the COO, charting a course that would build community-owned strategies.

What makes Communities of Opportunity different from past efforts?

COO seeks to change the way today's maps of health, social, and economic indicators look (see next page). To do that, these three mechanisms underpin *how* COO works:

- ✓ **Catalysts.** First, the scope and scale of the issues to be addressed are so complex that solutions will only happen through better alignment of funding streams and community resources. COO brings additional investment to develop this alignment, so local partners can better coordinate what's already out there to produce greater impact. In addition, institutional partners will look at changing their own policies and practices to increase equity in our communities.
- ✓ **Collaboration.** Second, a place-based approach can succeed only through collaboration across different sectors and the players who have a stake in it. Solutions are bigger than anything one organization can achieve on its own. Finding new allies with common interests is a big part of the work.
- ✓ **Community ownership.** Third, sustainability and results are possible only with true community ownership of solutions. Allowing for the space, time, and resources so that ownership can flourish is essential.

GETTING STARTED: Setting the stage with a first round of investments

- ✓ In early October 2014, The Seattle Foundation and King County announced a first round of investments, which focus on improving equity through policy and systems level work that engages or is led by affected communities. Over 90 organizations submitted applications and more than \$1 million in grants to 12 organizations will be announced.

GETTING FOCUSED: Place-based investments in 3 communities (neighborhoods or cities).

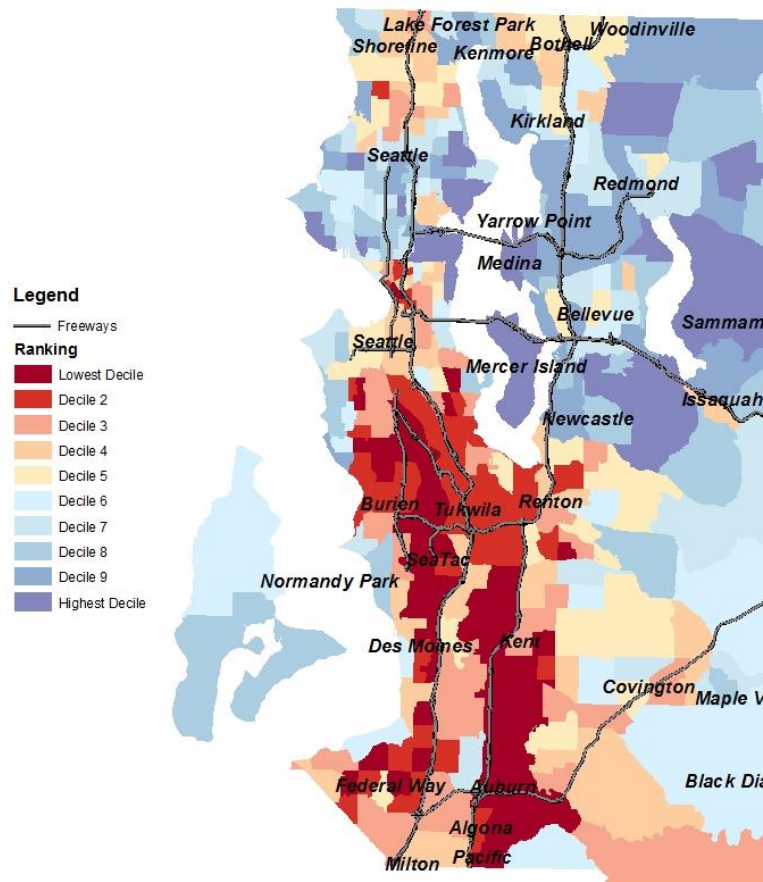
- ✓ The heart of COO is a multi-year partnership with a limited set of geographic areas – initially the focus will be three places. Our theory is that lasting, effective solutions to inequities can be achieved only when they are informed by the people affected by them and when those people have the capacity to influence changes necessary to improve outcomes.
- ✓ This fall, following a process to identify the three communities, collaborative work will get underway—driven by each community's agenda and priorities—to address root causes of what's contributing to health, social, racial, and economic inequities.
- ✓ The intent is that this initial set of partner communities will set the stage for expansion to other locations, as we learn together about what works.

For more information, contact either of the COO staff leads: Kirsten Wysen (Kirsten.wysen@kingcounty.gov) or Alice Ito (a.ito@seattlefoundation.org).



Map of King County, Washington: Census tracts ranked by an index of health, housing and economic opportunity measures

Communities of Opportunity is working in the two deciles of census tracts (highlighted in red and dark red) that rank lowest on an index of the ten measures in the table below. There are almost 400 census tracts in King County and each has an approximate population size of 5,000.



Measures	Dark red areas Lowest 10%	Dark blue areas Highest 10%
Life expectancy	74 years	87 years
Health, broadly defined:		
Adverse childhood experiences	20%	9%
Frequent mental distress	14%	4%
Smoking	20%	5%
Obesity	33%	14%
Preventable hospitalizations	1.0%	0.4%
Housing:		
Poor housing condition	8%	0%
Economic opportunity:		
Low-income, below 200% poverty	54%	6%
Unemployment	13%	3%